strengthening and deepening of consultations and to enhancing coordination on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues of mutual concern.

PM and President Khatami emphasised the need to enhance trade ties, economic and technical cooperation and cultural contacts. They emphasised the need to promote tourism and decided that India would hold an 'India-Week' in Iran and correspondingly Iran would hold an 'Iran Week' in India. Both sides recognised the importance of preservation of peace, security and stability in the region and agreed to enhance mutual cooperation for safeguarding peace and stability in the region which was witnessing the rise of extremist forces, terrorism and enhanced flow of illicit drugs. In their discussion on international matters, the two leaders emphasised equality between nations and governments.

(c) and (d) India and Iran have historical ties of friendship and cooperation and PM's recent visit to Iran has opened a new chapter in our bilateral relations. PM's interaction with the Iranian leadership witnessed a reiteration of a mutual desire to build on civilisational affinities and cultural commonalties, impart commercial, economic and technological depth to the relationship, pursue the continuing dialogue at official and political levels on regional and international issues.

India's move on demolition of Buddha Statues in Afghanistan

4466. SHRI YADLAPATI VENKAT RAO: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to move International Court of Justice against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan for demolition of thousand years old Buddha statues in Afghanistan;

(b) whether India have written to many Heads of Government's about this Act of vandalism in Afghanistan;

(c) if so, what has been their response in this regard; and

(d) the details of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and

Cultural Organisation's action in this regard and its future action in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAM RAJU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) and (c) The Government has raised this issue internationally. Prime Minister wrote to several Heads of Governments, including the permanent members of the UN Security Council, the UN Secretary General and to Heads of Governments of countries with Buddhist populations (Bhutan, Japan, Sri Lanka, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mangolia, Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Republic of Korea) urging that the collective voice of humanity be raised against this outrage and that the Taliban be made to see reason. India co-sponsored a UNGA resolution adopted on 9th March, 2001 on the destruction of Bamiyan Buddhas and other manifestations of Afghanistan's pre-Islamic art. The Resolution called upon the Taliban to abide by their previous commitments to protect Afghanistan's cultural heritage from all acts of vandalism damage and theft.

There was widespread international condemnation of the Taliban militia's actions. The UN Secretary General, Director General of UNESCO, European Union and several Muslim countries were severely critical of the Taliban militia. During Prime Minister's recent visit to Iran, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran while condemning the Taliban actions said that they had brought a bad name to Islam.

(d) Following the Taliban decree of 26th February, 2001, Director General of UNESCO on the same day issued a strong public appeal urging the Afghan people to take action to prevent destruction of their heritage. He also sent a telegram to Mullah Omar urging him to reconsider his decision. He also made efforts to moblise international opinion, particularly with the leaders of the OIC, including Pakistan and urged them to use their influence and that of the Islamic world with the Taliban. His efforts included organising the visit to Kabul of a delegation of Islamic religious leaders. He also nominated a retired French diplomat as his Special Envoy to visit Kabul and take up the matter with the Taliban authorities. Director General of UNESCO

has further pledged that efforts will continue to save the remaining pre-Islamic artifacts in Afghanistan. To this end, the DG has appealed to dealers, collaborators and Member States to fight against the traffic in Afghan cultural properties and drawn attention to the colligation of State Parties under the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import, export and traffic in ownership of cultural property. UNESCO has also opened a Special Fund for Safeguarding of Afghanistan's Cultural Heritage.

Advisory Committee to improve functioning of Passport Offices

4467. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to constitute an advisory Committee consisting of eminent local personalities to improve functioning of the passport offices in the country;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI KRISHNAM RAJU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The working of the passport offices is already being closely monitored by the Standing Committee of Parliament on External Affairs.

Indonesia's support to India's Peace move

4468. SHRI GHULAM NABI AZAD: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the news item which appeared in the 'Hindustan Times' dated 10th January, 2001 captioned "Indonesia support India's peace move in Jammu & Kashmir"; and